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INTELLIGENCE PERFORMANCE GETS GOOD GRADES
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WASHINGTON

A congressional report Wednesday gave U.S. intelligence agencies generally good grades for their performance in Central America but found several failures since 1978.

The declassified House staff report made clear the intelligence community's overall performance in the region 'is strong' and the weaknesses cited 'are of limited significance ... and reflect only a small part of intelligence performance on Central America.'

It cited weaknesses, oversimplifications and misstatements that, however minor, 'may be symptoms of a more important problem.'

'They may signal that the environment in which analytic thought and production decisions occur is under pressure to reinforce policy - or perhaps to oppose it -- rather than to inform it,' it said.

The report was prepared by the staff of the House Intelligence Committee, deals mainly with CIA analysis of the situation, and centers on events in El Salvador and Nicaragua. It is the second of its kind released by Congress.

Rep. Charlie Rose, D-N.C., chairman of the panel's oversight and evaluation subcommittee whose staff prepared the report, noted intelligence officials objected its release.

'It is no secret that our committee labored mightily over the decision to release this staff report,' Rose said.

'Some members shared the intelligence agencies' fear that public release would damage public confidence in intelligence, but I believe that public release of an unclassified report like this, that both praises and criticizes intelligence performance, will actually strengthen public confidence in intelligence and in the congressional oversight process.'

He also said the subject of the report was 'intelligence, not Central America and not U.S. policy.'

The report said intelligence agencies have 'contributed significantly to meet the needs of policymakers on Central America.'

'Over the last two years perhaps its greatest achievement lies in determining with considerable accuracy the organization and activities of the Salvadoran guerrillas, and in detecting the assistance given to them by Cuba and other communist countries,' it said.

'Although amounts of aid and degrees of influence are difficult to assess, intelligence has been able to establish beyond doubt the involvement of communist countries in the (Salvadoran) insurgency.'

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